

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5765
INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMCONSUL CAPETOWN
AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L LUSAKA 1506

CAPETOWN FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, AO
SUBJ: STATUS OF UNITA INSIDE ANGOLA

SUMMARY: AN AMERICAN JOURNALIST PORTRAYS UNITA AS WELL ARMED, DISCIPLINED, BRUTALLY EFFECTIVE AND IN CONTROL OF THE COUNTRYSIDE SOUTH OF THE BENGUELA RAILROAD IN ANGOLA. THE JOURNALIST, WHO SPENT SIX MONTHS WITH UNITA IN ANGOLA, SEES LITTLE CHANCE OF COMBINED MPLA/CUBAN FORCES ELIMINATING UNITA, BUT ON THE OTHER HAND DOES NOT BELIEVE UNITA IS STRONG ENOUGH TO WIN A MILITARY VICTORY OVER THE MPLA. CHANCES FOR A RECONCILIATION BETWEEN UNITA, MPLA, AND FNLA APPEAR TO BE NIL. SWAPO AND UNITA ARE BITTER ENEMIES. UNITA APPARENTLY IS RECEIVING LITTLE IF ANY SUPPORT FROM OUTSIDE ANGOLA. END SUMMARY.

1. AMERICAN JOURNALIST MAY 30 GAVE EMBOFF A RUNDOWN ON HIS
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IMPRESSIONS OF THE MILITARY SITUATION WITHIN ANGOLA. JOURNALIST ARRIVED IN LUSAKA MAY 29 AFTER SPENDING BETTER THAN SIX MONTHS WITH UNITA INSIDE ANGOLA. FOLLOWING IS THE JOURNALIST'S ASSESSMENT.

2. UNITA CONTROLS THE COUNTRYSIDE IN THE AREA SOUTH OF THE BENGUELA RAILROAD. ALL BRIDGES LINKING THE NORTH WITH THE SOUTH HAVE BEEN CUT. FOUR ENGINE, PROP DRIVEN PLANES OF RUSSIAN MAKE ARE

USED AS THE ONLY MEANS OF TRANSPORTING MATERIAL AND MEN BY THE MPLA TO AND FROM THE LARGER CITIES IN THE SOUTH. CUBANS HAVE PULLED OUT OF THE SOUTHERN PART OF ANGOLA EXCEPT FOR THE MAJOR CITIES. UNITA HAS MOVED 700 MEN INTO MALENJE PROVINCE--A TRADITIONAL MPLA STRONGHOLD. ALL MAJOR BRIDGES ON THE BENGUELA RAILROAD HAVE BEEN BLOWN AND SECTIONS OF TRACK REMOVED AND PARTS OF IT MINED. SIMILARLY, THE BRIDGES ON THE SOUTHERN RAILROAD FROM SERPO PINTO TO THE SEA AT MOCAMODES HAVE BEEN BLOWN, MAKING IT UNUSEABLE. MPLA FORCES RARELY MOVE OUT OF THE CITIES ON PATROL; WHEN THEY DO THEY ARE SUBJECT TO UNITA AMBUSHES. UNITA FORCES HAVE SYSTEMATICALLY DESTROYED THE SMALLER TOWNS THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH. AFTER THE CAPTURE OF A TOWN, MPLA TROOPS AND ANY CIVILIANS REMAINING ARE KILLED. UNITA WARNS ITS SUPPORTERS IN ADVANCE OF AN ATTACK THAT ANYONE REMAINING IN THE TOWN WILL BE CONSIDERED AN MPLA SYMPATHIZER AND WILL BE KILLED. ALL BUILDINGS IN CAPTURED TOWNS AND VILLAGES ARE RAZED TO THE GROUND. ANY CUBANS TAKEN PRISONER ARE EXECUTED. (IN HIS MONTHS IN ANGOLA, THE JOURNALIST NEVER SAW A CUBAN; UNITA ESTIMATES ONE THOUSAND CUBANS HAVE BEEN KILLED SINCE THEY ARRIVED IN ANGOLA.)

3. THE OVAMBUNDU IN THE SOUTH ARE LOYAL TO UNITA AND SAVIMBI AND WILLINGLY PROVIDE RECRUITS AND FOOD FOR THE UNITA FORCES. SAVIMBI ALSO COMMANDS SUPPORT FROM 10 OR 12 SMALLER SOUTHERN TRIBES. UNITA IS A BOURGEOISE, ETHNICALLY BASED MOVEMENT DEVOID OF IDEOLOGY. THE STRUCTURE OF UNITA STARTS AT THE VILLAGE LEVEL WHERE THERE ARE SMALL UNITA CELLS, OFTEN INCLUDING LOCAL CHIEFTANS. THE NEXT LEVEL IS A CENTRAL COMMITTEE TO WHICH THE VILLAGE CELLS SEND REPRESENTATIVES. THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE IS LARGE AND CUMBERSOME. AT THE SUMMIT OF UNITA IS THE POLITICAL BUREAU. IN THEORY CONFIDENTIAL

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COMMUNICATION IS BOTH FROM THE TOP TO THE BOTTOM AND BOTTOM TO THE TOP. SAVIMBI IS THE PIVOTAL FIGURE OF UNITA; IF HE SHOULD BE KILLED, UNITA COULD DIE. THERE IS NO REPLACEMENT WHO COMMANDS THE SAME LOYALTY. UNITA FORCES ARE WELL ARMED WITH A WIDE VARIETY OF SMALL ARMS (RUSSIAN, BELGIAN, PORTUGUESE, AMERICAN). THEIR HEAVIEST WEAPON IS A 75 MILIMETER RECOILESS RIFLE. THERE ARE NO SIGNS OF SOUTH AFRICAN EQUIPMENT OR SUPPORT OTHER THAN RAINCOATS AND CANTEENS LEFT OVER FROM THE SOUTH AFRICAN INTERVENTION IN 1975. THE JOURNALIST IS CONVINCED THAT HE WOULD HAVE LEARNED OF SOUTH AFRICAN COOPERATION HAD IT EXISTED. SAVIMBI, HE SAID, FULLY UNDERSTANDS THE DANGER OF SOUTH AFRICAN COLLABORATION. THE JOURNALIST SAID HE SAW NO EVIDENCE OF OUTSIDE SUPPORT FOR UNITA FROM ANY SOURCE. COMMUNICATIONS ARE ASSURED BY RUNNER AND HAND OPERATED RADIOS OF BRITISH MAKE. FOOD SUPPLIES ARE PLENTIFUL EXCEPT IN THE THINLY POPULATED REGION BORDERING ON ZAMBIA. MEDICINES ARE RARE OR NONEXISTENT. PAYMENT FOR FOOD AND OTHER SUPPLIES IN THE UNITA-CONTROLLED AREA IS MADE IN ESCUCOS; WHENEVER THE NEW ANGOLAN CURRENCY FALLS INTO UNITA HANDS IT IS WITHDRAWN FROM CIRCULATION. AT A LATER DATE UNITA PLANS TO DROP

IT BACK INTO CIRCULATION IN THE HOPE OF GENERATING INFLATION.

4. THERE IS ALMOST NO PROSPECT OF A UNITA RECONCILIATION WITH MPLA AND RELATIONS WITH THE FNLA AND SWAPO ARE EXTREMELY POOR. TOO MUCH BLOOD HAS BEEN SHED ON BOTH SIDES FOR THE MPLA AND UNITA TO COME TOGETHER ON A PEACEFUL BASIS. THE ONLY HOPE FOR A SETTLEMENT IS ARMED VICTORY BY ONE OR THE OTHER. UNITA REGARDS THE FNLA AS AN ENEMY AND SHOWS NO INTEREST IN COLLABORATING WITH THAT MOVEMENT. THE FNLA FOUGHT BITTERLY DURING THE BRIEF COALITION ARRANGEMENT IN 1975 AND WOULD DO SO AGAIN IF THEY CAME INTO CONTACT. SWAPO AND UNITA ARE ON A SHOOT FIRST AND ASK QUESTIONS LATER FOOTING; FULL SCALE WAR EXISTS BETWEEN THE TWO GUERRILLA GROUPS. UNITA IS TRYING TO ESTABLISH CLOSER LIAISON WITH FLEC. IT IS COUNTING ON ITS SECRETARY GENERAL, WHO HAS CLOSE CONTACT WITH FLEC, TO PULL THIS OFF.

5. UNITA HAD MIXED FEELINGS ABOUT THE EX-KATANGAN GENDARMES
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ATTACK INTO SHABA. IT WAS GLAD TO GET THEM OUT OF ANGOLA ON THE ONE HAND, BUT CONCERNED ABOUT THE EFFECT ON MOBUTU'S GOVERNMENT. ITS PRIMARY FEELING, HOWEVER, WAS GOOD RIDDANCE.

6. THE JOURNALIST ESTIMATES THAT UNITA CAN HOLD ON INDEFINITELY IN THE SOUTH BUT DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT IT HAS THE CAPABILITY OF GAINING AN ARMED VICTORY OVER COMBINED UNITA-CUBAN FORCES. HE FORESEES A BLOODY STANDOFF GOING ON FOR YEARS. LOW

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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